

In the Claims:

75. (Currently Amended) A method of fulfilling an information need comprising:

receiving a query pertaining to the information need, the query comprised of a fully specified term and a partially unspecified term wherein the partially unspecified term is representative of a matching restriction designed to meaningfully restrict the query results;

processing the query against a plurality of information containing documents to determine a query match based on the presence of the fully specified term and the presence of a match to the matching restriction of the partially unspecified term within a document, wherein the order of the fully specified term with respect to the match to the matching restriction of the partially unspecified term need not be in the same order as the query; and

returning a result that includes the matching portion of the document in which a query match was determined;

wherein the partially unspecified term includes at least one of a (i) syntactic restriction having syntactical criteria including one of a noun phrase, verb phrase, prepositional phrase, adverbial phrase, and adjectival phrase; or (ii) morphological restriction comprised of morphological criteria that define a feature of word structure, function, or inflection including one of a noun, verbal noun, adjective, conjunction, pronoun, adverb, verb, transitive verb, intransitive verb, verb in past tense, verb in present tense, verb in future tense, present participle of a verb, past participle of a verb, and gerund; or (iii) categorical restriction.

76. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 75, further comprising:

identifying documents that contain the partially unspecified term in an index;

identifying contexts within the index in accordance with the query wherein the index includes pre-analyzed contexts of terms appearing within the plurality of information containing documents;

converting the query into a finite state automaton (FSA); and

matching the finite state automaton (FSA) against the identified contexts.

77. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 76, wherein the finite state automaton (FSA) is a finite state transducer (FST).

78. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 76, wherein the finite state automaton (FSA) allows for the appearance of fully specified and at least partially unspecified terms in any order in a potential matching context.

79. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 76, wherein the finite state automaton (FSA) allows for one or more intervening words between the fully specified and at least partially unspecified terms in a potential matching context.

80. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 76, wherein the contexts are stored as finite state automata (FSAs).

81. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 76, wherein the documents are accessible over the Internet.

82. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 76, wherein the documents comprise World Wide Web Pages.

83. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 75 further comprising assigning a score to the query match.

84. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 83 wherein the score reflects the number of times an instance of the query match is located among the plurality of documents.

85. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 84 further comprising ranking the documents that contain a query match based on a number of times the query match is located within a document.

86. Please cancel claim 86.

87. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 76 wherein the index comprises locations of terms within documents.

88. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 87 further comprising:  
determining the location of a term in the query within a document using the index; and  
locating a query match for the query based on the location of the term within the document.

89. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 88 further comprising ranking a plurality of the located matches or portions thereof.

90. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 89 wherein the ranking is based on one or more features selected from the list consisting of: the location of a match within a document, a weight assigned to a document that contains a match, the age of a document that contains a match, the source of a document that contains a match, and a format feature of a match within a document.

91. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 75 wherein the query includes a delimiter indicating a first portion of the query for which a relative order is preserved for one or more terms included in the first portion, the relative order being in accordance with a physical position of each term in the first portion with respect to any other terms in the first portion.

92. Please cancel claim 92.

93. Please cancel claim 93.

94. Please cancel claim 94.

95. Please cancel claim 95.

96. Please cancel claim 96.

97. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 75 wherein the matching restriction includes a criteria defined in accordance with a determination by a computer program.

98. (Currently Amended) A computer readable medium storing a computer program product for fulfilling an information need, the computer readable medium comprising:

computer program code for receiving a query pertaining to the information need, the query comprised of a fully specified term and a partially unspecified term wherein the partially unspecified term is representative of a matching restriction designed to meaningfully restrict the query results;

computer program code for processing the query against a plurality of information containing documents to determine a query match based on the presence of the fully specified term and the presence of a match to the matching restriction of the partially unspecified term within a document, wherein the order of the fully specified term with respect to the match to the matching restriction of the partially unspecified term need not be in the same order as the query; and

computer program code for returning a result that includes the matching portion of the document in which a query match was determined,

wherein the partially unspecified term includes at least one of a (i) syntactic restriction having syntactical criteria including one of a noun phrase, verb phrase, prepositional phrase, adverbial phrase, and adjectival phrase; or (ii) morphological restriction comprised of morphological criteria that define a feature of word structure, function, or inflection including one of a noun, verbal noun, adjective, conjunction, pronoun, adverb, verb, transitive verb, intransitive verb, verb in past tense, verb in present tense, verb in future intense, present participle of a verb, past participle of a verb, and gerund; or (iii) categorical restriction.

99. (Previously Presented) The computer readable medium of claim 98, further comprising:

computer program code for identifying documents that contain the partially unspecified term in an index, the index including pre-analyzed contexts of terms appearing within the plurality of documents; and

computer program code for identifying contexts within the index in accordance with the query, the index including preanalyzed contexts of terms appearing within a plurality of documents;

computer program code for converting the query into a finite state automaton (FSA);  
and

computer program code for matching the finite state automaton (FSA) against the identified contexts.